Masthead Logo

The Palimpsest

Volume 48 | Number 4

Article 4

4-1-1967

Camp Mills

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CAMP MILLS

HERE on the flat, uninteresting Hempstead Plain, midway between Garden City and Hempstead, a new organization, destined to be one of the outstanding units of the A. E. F., was assembling. The 42nd Division, organized in early August, was composed of especially selected units of the National Guard chosen from twenty-six States and the District of Columbia. Every section of the country, with the exception of New England, contributed to it. States so widely separated as Oregon and Georgia, New York and California, sent their sons to form this most truly national of all our divisions. Covering in its representation a span as far flung as the arc of the rainbow, and with a complexion as varied, it was happily named the Rainbow Division. Colonel Douglas MacArthur, the then Chief of Staff, is credited with this inspiration at the very time of the Division's organization. The aptness of the appellation was quickly recognized by the public, and so the 42nd became the first of the American divisions to be known by a distinctive name. The colors of the rainbow were never more indissolubly blended than the units of this organization, for of this sectional mélange was born the finest esprit de corps that ever led troops to victory.

When the 168th got settled in camp, and had time to look about, it found itself between the 167th Infantry from Alabama, with which it was brigaded, and the 151st Machine Gun Battalion from Georgia; while to the west

lay the camp of the Ohio regiment, the 166th Infantry. Friendships soon sprang up among all of these organizations, but none equalled the attachment which grew up between the 167th and 168th. The foundation for this friendship was laid the very first night.

Fate had divisioned together two regiments, the 165th, formerly the 69th New York, and the 167th, once the Fourth Alabama, which had opposed each other in some of the most bitter struggles of the Civil War. The outcome of those encounters is somewhat in doubt, but all good members of the 168th will declare, although their forebears fought on the opposite side, that the successful contestant was from the South. Enough to say that the fight did not end with the Peace of Appomattox: the feelings born of that struggle still rankled, despite the passage of time.

Fate had not only placed these two regiments in the same division, but had placed them side by side when they came together for the first time in more than fifty years. The Iowans learned soon after their arrival that there had already been a clash, and that Alabama was out for gore. The Southerners that night, the rumor said, were going to "clean up" Iowa. They had battled New York, and Iowa was next.

The prairie boys, however, were not to be caught napping; plans were made, unknown to the officers, and nightfall heard among the men of the 168th whisperings that promised ill. At seven o'clock, two groups in menacing attitude faced each other on the road dividing their camps. A group from the other side crossed over. Hostilities seemed unavoidable. Suddenly out of the milling crowd came in the soft drawl of the South:

"What do you-all mean, fightin'? Iowa's our friend."

It was the voice of a peacemaker, and it extinguished forever the spark that might have exploded the charge of sectional antagonism and permanently disrupted a potential friendship of lasting qualities. For instead of battling, the two forces joined arms and wandered away.

Never was there a friendship of closer unity; never an association of more pleasant memory. For throughout the war the two regiments fought together, always side by side, always with the thought of the other as much in mind as the thought of themselves and of their cause. No hungry Iowan was ever refused at an Alabama kitchen, even in the days of slimmest ration; and never did a lad from the Southland find any but friends around the Iowa camp. The Iowa latchstring will be out for Alabama as long as the 168th is remembered in its home State.

That night, too, saw the end of ill feeling between the 165th and the 167th. In joining the two in a common mission, Fate had provided for the eradication of memories of a past fratricidal conflict. From now on the elements of the Rainbow were to work as one.

Mess shacks had already been built when the regiment came into camp, and by noon the tentage which they had brought with them was in place. Enough new canvas was issued to house the entire regiment in pyramidals, but only by crowding ten or twelve in each. That completed, the men were free for the rest of the day, which was spent chiefly in gazing in rapt awe at the airplanes circling and dipping gracefully in the sky above them. Many of them had never before seen an airplane, and to these it was a fascinating sight.

The next day the 168th received its first leavening of alien blood. About sixty graduates of the first Officers'

Training Camp were assigned to fill up the shortage in the commissioned personnel. Up to this time three harassed men in each company had been doing the work of six. New York, Texas, and the New England States furnished the majority of the newcomers. They were for the most part young, eager, college-bred men, excellently grounded in theory and familiar with the later developments of their branch of modern warfare, but lacking in the practical experience of handling troops. Volunteers, too, they soon absorbed the spirit of the National Guard, in spite of their training under Regular Army instructors.

The stay at Camp Mills was concerned chiefly with the hard work preparatory to crossing the ocean; equipping, packing, and discarding; and not least of all, whipping the troops into shape. Work was now commenced in earnest. A drill field about a mile from camp was set aside for the 168th, and there hour after hour in the broiling sun or drenching rain they toiled, fitting themselves for service overseas.

A great deal of time was devoted to the new bayonet drill, for the men were told that the Germans disliked cold steel and that the bayonet was the most effective weapon of the infantryman. This manual, which did not arouse the pleasantest of expectations, was calculated not only to make the individual adept in the use of the bayonet but also to fire him with blood lust. To produce a good fighter, it is necessary first to awaken in him his primitive instincts. And the youngsters from the Middle West were far from blood-thirsty. Every jab punctured a mentally-pictured Kaiser; every thrust saw the finish of one of his subjects. If the knife became too deeply imbedded in the body, it could be withdrawn by planting the feet on his trunk and pulling, or by shooting him

through point-blank; if he attempted to resist the withdrawal of a bayonet implanted in his loins, there were means to force him to loose his hold. It was an ugly business, but necessary, and one that gave the men some sort of idea of what they had to face.

Hardened into first-class physical form by vigorous exercise and firmly encased in the iron bands of discipline through the constant repetition of close order drill, the men of the Rainbow, by the time they left Camp Mills, were well prepared to meet the foe.

The 168th was poorly equipped when it left Iowa, and as it was the last unit to reach the concentration camp, it had to rush to catch up with the others. While the line companies were sweating out on the drill fields, the Supply Company was working at full speed to procure and distribute supplies and equipment. Finally each man was issued a woolen uniform and the short trench coat that replaced the longer garment with its hampering skirts. This work was not entirely completed until the night before embarkation; and it was because of the order requiring every division to be fully equipped before it could sail that the Rainbow was held back while the 26th, or Yankee Division, was permitted to have the distinction of being the first National Guard and the second American division to arrive in France. But after all, the Rainbow was the first complete division to cross the seas. When it was finally settled in its training area with its organization intact, the First Division, which had preceded it by four months, and the 26th, by a few weeks, were still lacking some of their auxiliary units.

On Sunday, the 23rd of September, the Division was reviewed by the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker. It was the first time that a division under the new war

regulations — companies of 250, battalions of 1000, and regiments of 3700 — was ever seen in the United States. An immense throng from New York and all parts of Long Island came to witness the spectacle, and to cheer as line after line of sturdy khaki figures, lean, bronzed, and erect, marched past.

This was followed a few days later by a review of the 84th Brigade, composed of the 167th and 168th Infantry Regiments and the 151st Machine Gun Battalion, in honor of the United States Senators from Iowa, Albert B. Cummins and William S. Kenyon, and the Governor, William L. Harding.

But there were variations to the steady grind of training. Passes were liberally issued for the purpose of visiting New York, less than an hour distant; and at some time or other practically every member of the regiment had an opportunity to walk up Broadway, see the bright lights, the skyscrapers, Grant's Tomb, the fleet in the river, and anything else that appealed to him.

The residents of the towns in the vicinity of Camp Mills did their best to make the men feel that although they were far from home they were still surrounded by friends. The tradition of Eastern reserve and selfishness was banished by the outpouring of welcome and hospitality that met the soldiers on every hand.

On the 23rd of September, Lieutenant Colonel Tinley slipped quietly away; his absence was soon noted; and when it was learned that he had sailed to prepare the way for the regiment, rumors began to fly about as thick as leaves before an autumn wind. But from then until the last of the first week in October, there was nothing to indicate that the steady routine of drill, parade, hiking, and lectures would ever be interrupted.

Then on the 8th came the order to have all freight ready for shipping in two days; the afternoons from

then on were to be given over to the marking and packing of baggage and equipment. The name of the transport and the time of departure were closely guarded, and all that was known was that our boat was to be No. 7 in the convoy, for all freight and baggage was marked with the figure 7 in a circle. Some time previous the trunks of the enlisted men had been disposed of and barrack bags substituted, and the baggage of the officers had been pared down to a minimum. On the 16th everything but the kitchens and officers' baggage was sent to the dock, and it was known that the day was not far off. And at the last hour the regiment was informed of the generous provision the government had made for the issue of life insurance for all soldiers. The officers and company clerks stayed up half the night writing applications for the men and adjusting the allowances for their families under the recently issued regulations.

On the 17th it was officially announced that the outfit would leave the next day. It was with mixed feelings that the news was received. Now that the time had come, Camp Mills didn't seem a half bad place, and it was after all the last link with home. But one couldn't very well get into the fight without crossing the ocean. It was a busy day; the last bit of baggage had to be packed, the camp thoroughly policed, and the last letter written home.

At six o'clock on the morning of the 18th the clear call of a bugle in the crisp October air stirred the camp to life and sent some thousands of men bustling to and fro. Tents were furled, men lined up and inspected, and all was in readiness. At ten o'clock the regiment moved out, marched to the Clinton Avenue Station, and entrained for the short ride to Long Island City. There it was transferred to ferries which pushed their weighted bulks

down the East River under the graceful arch of Brooklyn Bridge, around the southern point of Manhattan Island, and headed up the North River to the Hoboken piers of the Hamburg-American Line.

The *President Grant,* a boat of 18,000 gross tons, formerly in the German merchant marine, was moored at the dock, waiting for her first cargo of American soldiers. In a few hours she had swallowed into her dark interior the entire regiment. At half past nine that evening in a cold drizzle the vessel slowly backed from her berth, righted herself with the aid of a few puffing tugs, and like a phantom ship, dark, silent, with every port-hole tightly closed, glided down the river. The few officers on deck watched the hazy outline of the towering city gradually merge into the night, gazed intently until Liberty, her lighted torch raised as if in benediction, was lost to view, and then without speaking went below. The next morning a tossing, boundless sea encompassed the *Grant.*

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The voyage on the *Grant* proved a nightmare. Unable to keep up with the troop convoy, the *Grant* was forced to turn back when 880 miles out of New York. Meanwhile, the filth and stench under which the men had lived below deck led to a smallpox epidemic. The *Grant* was described by one Iowa Medical Officer as the "most unsanitary boat of ancient or modern times." After a brief sojourn at Camp Mills, the 168th again prepared to board ship and set out overseas on the *Aurania* and *Celtic,* [The Editor].